



Meningococcal Meningitis: What You Need to Know

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria. It is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2-18 years of age in the United States. Meningitis is an infection of the brain and spinal cord coverings. Meningococcal bacteria can also cause infection in the blood.

About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S., and 10-15 percent of those people die, even though most of them receive treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, another 10 percent lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. But it is most common in infants less than one year of age, and in people with certain medical conditions. **College freshmen, particularly those who live in dormitories, have a slightly increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.**

How is meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal disease is spread by intimate or direct exposure to someone who has the disease. Intimate or direct exposure includes being touched or kissed, sharing eating utensils, or contact with any fluids from the body of the person who has the disease.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Symptoms are usually sudden and begin like the flu: fever, feeling generally unwell, headache, vomiting, and in some cases a stiff neck. People with this disease are visibly sick and may be confused, excited, or drowsy. Sometimes a reddish-purple rash that may look like bruises appears. The rash is flat and smooth, does not itch, and may spread quickly once it starts.

Because the disease spreads quickly in the body, it is important to go to a doctor or an emergency room immediately if you have a fever greater than 101 degrees and a severe sudden headache along with any of these symptoms:

- neck or back stiffness,
- mental changes (feeling edgy or confused),
- rash

Who should get meningococcal vaccine?

Meningococcal vaccine is not routinely recommended for most people. People who *should* get the vaccine include:

- U.S. military recruits
- Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where meningococcal disease is common, such as West Africa.
- Anyone who has a damaged spleen, or whose spleen has been removed.
- Anyone who has an immune system disorder known as terminal complement component deficiency.
- Lab workers who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria

Meningococcal vaccine is usually not recommended for children under two years of age. But under special circumstances it may be given to infants as young as three months of age (the vaccine does not work as well in very young children). Ask your health care provider for details.

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Should college students receive meningococcal vaccine?

College freshmen, especially those who live in dormitories, and their parents should discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with their health care providers.



How many doses are given?

- For people two years of age and over: one dose
(Sometimes an additional dose is recommended for people who continue to be at high risk. Ask your doctor or nurse.)
- For children three months to two years of age who need the vaccine: Two doses, three months apart.

Who should not get the vaccine?

- People who have ever had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine.
- People with moderate or severe illnesses should usually wait until they recover.

What are the possible side effects from meningococcal vaccine?

- redness or pain where the shot was given
- fever in a small percentage of people

Where can I get this vaccine?

Call your doctor, your local health department or 1-888-76-SHOTS

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For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_a.htm

Meningitis Foundation of America: www.musa.org

American College Health Association:

http://www.acha.org/projects_programs/men.cfm

Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/ACIP-list.htm>

Medline Plus Health Information:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000608.htm>

Central Michigan University, University Health Services:

<http://www.healthservices.cmich.edu/meningitis.htm>

Michigan State University, Olin Health Center:

<http://olin.msu.edu/mening.htm>

Northern Michigan University, Ada B. Vielmetti Health Center:

<http://www.nmu.edu/healthcenter/meningitis.htm>

University of Michigan, University Health Service:

<http://www.uhs.umich.edu/uhs/whatsup/meningitis.html>